

A. Lavalette House (Hotel 1829)
Kongens Gade 30 A
Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-11

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS
VII,
3-CHAM,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

A. LAVALETTE HOUSE (HOTEL 1829)

HABS
VI3-CHAM,
4-

Address: Kongens Gade 30 A, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas,
Virgin Islands.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Maguire.

Present Occupants: Owners and hotel guests.

Present Use: Hotel 1829.

Statement of Significance: This is one of the best surviving examples of the larger early 19th C. urban residences on St. Thomas.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

The original owner was presumably A. Lavalette, although the earliest documented record of this house, 18 Nov. 1831, is in the name of his heirs. They deeded the property to Abraham L. Gomez in 1840. Toward the end of the 19th C., it was owned by D. Von Linderman. Purchased by Doctor and Mrs. Herbert Taylor in 1900 and operated as a hotel until 1935. In 1939 it was acquired by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Maguire, and reopened as a hotel.

[Chain of title from Land Records in the St. Thomas Recorder of Deeds Office furnished by Frederick C. Gjessing, Architect, Virgin Islands National Park; and Tax Records in U.S. National Archives, Virgin Islands Records, Records Group 55, St. Thomas and St. John Tax Commission, Matriculae (rolls or registers) for 1829, 1831, 1839, 1840, 1841].

2. Date of erection: 1829-31. As its present name indicates, the traditional date for the erection of this building is 1829. However, the Matricula for 1829, cited above, shows that A. Lavalette was assessed 18 November 1829 at which time he owned no taxable buildings. On 18 November 1831 his heirs were assessed at this address for 774 square alen (one alen equals about two feet, or 0.627 meters) and paid a building tax of 24 rigsdaller 28 skilling (one rigsdaller equals 96 skilling, and is

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approximately equal to one pesos or piece-of-eight on which the value of the U. S. dollar was based). A dimensioned plan of the house, dated March, 1837, part of the Survey of Charlotte Amalie prepared by Hingelberg between 1833-37, corresponds with the present house. Additional backbuildings were apparently added during the 1830's because the next available Matricula for 1839 shows an assessment on 1267 square alen of 39 rigsdaller 57 skilling.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: For the past 65 years this building has served as one of the principal hotels on St. Thomas, and has gone under different names. Ober's Guide... (1908) refers to this Hotel as the "Grand," while calling the present Grand Hotel by a shortened form of its original name, the "Commercial." Kay Larsen, the Danish scholar of Denmark's colonial possessions, in his own notes written about 1917 calls this building the "Grand Hotel Taylor" and the "Hotel 1829."

C. Sources of Information:

Unpublished:

U. S. National Archives, Virgin Islands Records, Records Group 55, St. Thomas and St. John Tax Commission, Matriculae (rolls or records) for 1829, 1831, 1839, 1840, 1841.

Map of Charlotte Amalie, measured, drawn, and annotated by Frederick Christian Peter Hingelberg (1796-1850) between 1833-37. This portion dated March 1837. Photo-copies in the St. Thomas Public Library, and the Virgin Islands National Park Service Headquarters, St. Thomas.

Kay Larsen, "Personali og Data", personal card file now in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, microfilm copy at the St. Thomas Public Library.

Published:

Ober, Frederick A., A Guide to the West Indies and Bermuda (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1908), p. 319.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An outstanding example of an early 19th century St. Thomas residence. Although converted into a hotel, the original character of the building has been preserved in all essential features and has retained most of its original doors, windows, hardware, and finishes. Several additions have been made to the original U-shaped building along the east, north, and west sides of the lot, leaving a central open court of the former garden area. The additions are concrete and wooden frame structures of a recent date and have not seriously affected the 19th century structure. The additions are not covered in the following description.
2. Condition of fabric: Structurally sound and well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories. The main building is in the shape of a shallow U; later additions built to the rear along the borderlines of the lot. Eight-bay front.
2. Foundations: Towards the street the building rests on a retaining wall from four to ten feet high. Towards the rear it is built into the side of the hill. The foundations are constructed in brick and rubble masonry.
3. Wall construction: The walls are rubble masonry with brick lining of all wall openings and corners. All exposed surfaces were stuccoed or plastered and still retain this finish except for one interior.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The main entrance is located in the center of the street elevation. It is a six foot wide opening with a flat elliptical arch and a wooden gate. The gate has two leafs and a small central door hinged separately. The gate and the door are of a double board

construction. On the exterior they are laid diagonally forming a herringbone pattern. There are 12 other exterior doors, two to each floor towards the front and four to each floor towards the rear. All have flat-headed openings, double two-paneled wooden shutters, and double jalousie and paneled doors.

- b. Windows: All window openings are plain with flat heads and equipped with double two-paneled wooden shutters. Most windows still retain their original jalousie sash; however, in some cases they have been replaced by screen and glazed sash.
- 5. Roof: Low pitched shed roof behind parapet walls, with corrugated metal roofing on wooden framing.
- 6. Cornices, Eaves, Chimneys, etc.: The front of the building has a cornice at the second-floor ceiling height, surmounted by a parapet with a projecting coping and two finials at the front corners with molded caps and bands. The finial on the southwest corner contains the chimney. There is a flat belt course between the first and second story.
- 7. Porches, Balconies, etc.: The central section of the terrace in front of the building is covered by a roofed balcony supported on four square brick pillars with molded capitals and bands. The balcony has a simple wrought-iron rail with a center insert carrying the builder's initials. The balcony roof, corrugated metal on wooden framing, is supported on slender cast-iron columns. Towards the patio the building has a U-shaped balcony supported on semicircular arches flanked by pilasters and square brick columns decorated with molded bases, bands and capitals. The only access to the second floor and to the balcony is provided by a double three-run brick staircase starting in the center of the rear wall of the patio and swinging right and left along the rear and sides of the court.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan:

- a. First floor: The main entrance leads into a

hallway that goes through the building from front to back. One large and two small rooms are located on both sides of the hallway. The large room to the west, now the bar, was originally the kitchen and still contains the old masonry hearth and bake oven. The rooms east of the hallway were the large parlor and two small living rooms or offices. The rooms in the wing were store rooms and now serve as kitchen (west wing) and utility rooms for the hotel.

- b. Second floor: The second floor has two hallways that go through the building from rear to front at the head of the double staircase mentioned above. Both hallways have a room on either side which was split into two rooms when the building was converted into a hotel (total eight rooms). Additionally, bathrooms have been added and towards the rear they project into the patio balcony. The rooms in the wing are entered directly from the top stair landing.
2. Stairways: There is no interior staircase.
3. Floor: Except for the living rooms on the east side of the central hallway, all rooms on the ground floor and the patio are paved in brick. The living rooms and the stair landings are paved in old glazed ceramic tile laid in patterns. All rooms on the second floor have wooden flooring of recent date.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Walls throughout have retained their original plaster finish except in the former kitchen west of the central hallway on the ground floor. Here the walls have been cleaned of plaster and the exposed rubble masonry whitewashed. The ceilings on both floors are wood on exposed beams, except in the small living rooms and the modern additions of the second floor where the ceilings are furred.
5. Doorways and doors: All old interior doors are three-part double doors with adjustable louvers in the upper two sections and a solid panel in the lower part. They are identical to the secondary exterior doors previously mentioned.
6. Trim: The trim is limited to baseboard and ceiling moldings in the living rooms and the second floor rooms.

7. Hardware: There is a considerable amount of old hardware, consisting of wrought-iron strap, H, L, and wing hinges, hooks, bar brackets and door pulls, wrought-iron and brass surface bolts and box locks.
 8. Lighting: The building is wired for electricity.
 9. Heating: The only oven in the building is the old open range and bake oven mentioned above under floor plan.
- D. Site: The building is located on the north side of Kongens Gade (Kings Street) on a side of a steep hill facing south. It extends across the full width of the lot behind a partially roofed open terrace on the same level as the first floor. The only approach to the building is from Kongens Gade by a flared brick staircase with seventeen steps and wrought-iron rails leading up to and partially penetrating the terrace. The two short side wings extend into the lot along its east and west boundaries.

The building is flanked by two and one story buildings set in open yards and faces a small park sloping down to the main street of Charlotte Amalie to the south. Behind the building are one and two story additions to the hotel, which due to the steepness of the site are well above the roofline of the older section of the hotel. They are constructed and in part rest on the original retaining walls and terraces of the former garden area of the earlier residence and still use the masonry steps with additions in wood for vertical "transportation" between floors. The open area in the center of the lot is landscaped with tropical ornamental and flowering shrubs around the remains of the original architectural garden "furniture" of capped and banded gate posts, curved masonry steps, walls, etc.

Prepared by Frederik C. Gjessing
Architect, National Park Service
November 1960.

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